

# PRINCESS OLGA

A WILD AND BAREFOOT ROMANOV

Her Highness  
Princess Olga Romanoff  
with Coryne Hall



SHEPHEARD-WALWYN (PUBLISHERS) LTD

© Her Highness Princess Olga Romanoff

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher, Shephard-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd

First published in 2017 by  
Shephard-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd  
107 Parkway House, Sheen Lane,  
London SW14 8LS  
[www.shephard-walwyn.co.uk](http://www.shephard-walwyn.co.uk)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record of this book  
is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978 0 85683 517 9

Typeset by Alacrity, Chesterfield, Sandford, Somerset  
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom  
by Short Run Press, Exeter

# CONTENTS

<i>Cast of Main Characters</i>	viii
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	x
1 The Romanov Legacy	1
2 My Mother's Family	17
3 Nursery Days	31
4 Wild in Kent	47
5 Out into Society	66
6 Highland Fling	80
7 Provender	92
8 My Children	103
9 Provender Deteriorates	116
10 Restoration	123
11 Lost Heritage	135
12 Reflections	154

# CAST OF MAIN CHARACTERS

## MY FATHER'S FAMILY, THE ROMANOVS

### *My great-grandparents:*

Tsar Alexander III of Russia

Empress Marie Feodorovna, born Princess Dagmar of Denmark

### *My grandparents:*

Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna (Amama)

Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovich ('Sandro') (Apapa)

### *My parents:*

Prince Andrew Alexandrovich Romanoff

Nadine McDougall

### *My father's first wife:*

Elisabeta Ruffo di Sant' Antimo ('Elsa') (died 1940)

### *My half siblings:*

Princess Xenia ('Mysh') (1919-2000)

Prince Michael (1920-2008)

Prince Andrew (born 1923)

### *My father's uncles and aunt:*

Tsar Nicholas II

Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich

Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna

### *My father's cousins, children of Nicholas II:*

Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaievna

Grand Duchess Tatiana Nicolaievna

## CAST OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Grand Duchess Maria Nicolaievna  
Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicolaievna  
Tsarevich Alexei Nicolaievich

### *My father's sister and brothers:*

Princess Irina ('Aunt Titti'), wife of Prince Felix Yusupov  
Prince Feodor  
Prince Nikita  
Prince Dmitri  
Prince Rostislav  
Prince Vassili

### *My children:*

Nicholas (Nick)  
Francis (Fran)  
Alexandra ('Alex' or 'Poggy')  
Thomas (Tom, died as a baby)

## MY MOTHER'S FAMILY, THE BORGSTRÖMS & THE MCDUGALLS

### *My great-grandparents:*

Emil Borgström  
Constance Paterson ('Lally')

### *My grandparents:*

Sylvia Borgström (divorced)  
Herbert McDougall  
  
Herbert McDougall then married Cicely

### *My mother and her sisters:*

Nadine McDougall, wife of Prince Andrew Romanoff  
Pamela McDougall, wife of George, 4th Earl Sondes  
Flora McDougall, wife of Jack Kackley (divorced)

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

*All illustrations from Princess Olga's collection except 25 and 41*

Telegram from the Dowager Empress to Kyrill, 1924	148
Telegram from the Dowager Empress to Grand Duke Nicholas, 1924	148
Letter from the Dowager Empress to Kyrill, 1924	150
First page of Kyrill's letter in reply, 11 October 1924	151

*Between pages 68 and 69*

- 1 Princess Olga on the lap of Grand Duchess Xenia
- 2 Grand Duchess Xenia holding her eldest son, Prince Andrew
- 3 Grand Duchess Xenia with her son Prince Andrew
- 4 Grand Duchess Xenia with Princess Irina and Prince Andrew
- 5 Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovich and Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna with Princess Irina and Prince Andrew
- 6 Prince Andrew Alexandrovich with some of his siblings and children of neighbouring aristocrats
- 7 Prince Andrew Alexandrovich in his naval cadet uniform, driving an 'automobile'
- 8 Prince Rostislav Alexandrovich with his tutor in Grand Duke Alexander's palace
- 9 Grand Duke Alexander
- 10 Prince Nikita, Princess Irina, Prince Andrew, Prince Dmitri, Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, Prince Vassili, Prince Feodor, Prince Rostislav and Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovich
- 11 The courtyard at Ai-Todor with the 'Old House' and the 'New House'
- 12 Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovich's Crimean estate, Ai-Todor
- 13 The children of Grand Duchess Xenia and Grand Duke Alexander
- 14 Grand Duchess Xenia with her husband, siblings and nieces at Ai-Todor
- 15 Prince Andrew in his military uniform

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 16 The Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna and one of her grandsons
- 17 The Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna with her daughter Grand Duchess Xenia and her grandson Prince Nikita
- 18 Princes Andrew and Feodor at Livadia
- 19 *HMS Marlborough*, sent by King George V to evacuate the Dowager Empress and her relatives from the Crimea
- 20 Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna on board *HMS Marlborough* with her granddaughter Princess Irina
- 21 The Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna on board *HMS Marlborough* at Yalta
- 22 Grand Duchess Xenia with her children in exile
- 23 Grand Duchess Xenia at 'Wilderness House', Hampton Court
- 24 Prince Felix Felixovich Yusupov and Princess Irina Alexandrovna in exile in France
- 25 Grand Duke Kyrill Vladimirovich who proclaimed himself 'Emperor'. (Private collection)
- 26 Prince and Princess Andrew with their daughter, Princess Olga
- 27 Sister Helen Rowe holding two-month-old Princess Olga
- 28 Princess Olga aged six or seven months
- 29 Princess Olga in the pram made by the Queen's coachbuilder
- 30 Mother Martha with Princess Olga and Prince Andrew
- 31 Grand Duchess Xenia, Prince Alexander and Princess Margarita von Baden, holding Princess Olga
- 32 Princess Olga aged 7
- 33 Princess Olga's 'darling Nanny Ray'
- 34 Princess Andrew on Chasseur
- 35 Princess Olga on the donkey Neddy
- 36 Princess Olga on Tina, the pony on which she learnt to ride
- 37 Princess Olga and Thomas Mathew after their wedding
- 38 Princess Andrew with her mother Sylvia McDougall and Grand Duchess Xenia at Craigowan
- 39 Princess Olga's daughter Alexandra holding her brother Tom, who is holding Oscar
- 40 Princess Olga's sons Nick and Fran in ATC uniform
- 41 Princess Olga with Nick, Fran and Alexandra at Banchory. (Courtesy of Aberdeen Press and Journal)

# 1

## THE ROMANOV LEGACY

THERE COULDN'T BE a greater contrast between my upbringing in the wilds of the Kent countryside and my father's childhood in Imperial Russia.

My father, Prince Andrew Romanoff, was the eldest nephew of the murdered Tsar Nicholas II. On my birth certificate his occupation is stated as 'Prince of Russia'. My mother, Nadine McDougall, was my father's second wife, and a member of the wealthy McDougalls flour family.

My childhood was a cross between *The Darling Buds of May* and *Downton Abbey*. I suppose it was an idyllic childhood really.

I was born on 8 April 1950 and grew up at Provender, a historic house parts of which date back to the thirteenth century, near Faversham in Kent. Mother's family, the Borgströms and the McDougalls, had lived there for over a hundred years. I inherited the house when my mother, Nadine, died in 2000.

My earliest memory is of sitting on the rug in what was then the beautiful garden at Provender, then leaning over and picking a daisy. My father was on the grass nearby. After I looked at the flower my parents were encouraging me to crawl over to him. I must have been about six months old.

The paddock in front of the house now was then divided into three paddocks and they were all beautifully maintained. We had geese, donkeys and various other animals in them during my childhood, so I grew up with animals. In fact, I usually got on better with the animals than with the humans!



## PRINCESS OLGA

My father's life in Russia was of course totally different. He was born and brought up in a palace. Before he made his home in England he had already survived the threat of a Bolshevik firing squad. He and his family were lucky that they all managed to get out of Russia alive.

My paternal grandfather was Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovich, known as 'Sandro'. He married Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, the daughter of Alexander III and his Danish-born wife Dagmar, who became Empress Maria Feodorovna. Alexander and Dagmar had six children: Nicholas II, Alexander who died as a baby, George who died of TB in 1899, my grandmother Xenia, Michael and Olga. Sandro was the grandson of Nicholas I and Xenia was his *great*-granddaughter, so they were first cousins once removed. Sandro, after escaping from the Crimea and settling in France, wrote two very successful books about his life in Russia, *Once a Grand Duke*, and *Always a Grand Duke*.

Xenia and Sandro were married in 1894. Her aunt the Princess of Wales – later Queen Alexandra of Great Britain – came to St Petersburg for the wedding and Queen Victoria sent a present. Every guest received a souvenir – a little purse with the couple's monogram on it, closed by a drawstring and filled with French almonds. Later that year Xenia's father Tsar Alexander III died and her brother Nicholas became the Tsar. Little did 'Nicky' know then the terrible fate that awaited him and his family.

My grandmother had seven children before she was thirty. My grandfather attended all the births, which was very unusual in those days. He was an incredible man, so forward thinking. Apparently, after the revolution even the Soviets had a good opinion of him. He had founded the Russian Air Force, he was Admiral of the Fleet, Minister of Merchant Marine and he even had a club in Paris for the aviators. You name it, Sandro did it.

Their first child was Irina, my Aunt Titti, who was a great beauty and who at the age of eighteen married Prince Felix Yusupov – later to become one of Rasputin's murderers. Xenia had babies every eighteen to twenty months. All the others were boys – my father Andrew, then Feodor, Nikita, Dmitri, Rostislav and Vassili. Childbirth wasn't a problem to her; she just shelled them like peas.

The birth of all these healthy sons upset Empress Alexandra because between 1895 and 1901 she produced only girls who couldn't inherit

## THE ROMANOV LEGACY

the throne. When finally a son, Alexei, was born in 1904, he was discovered to be suffering from haemophilia, a disease that prevents the blood from clotting. It could be fatal at any time and the illness was kept a strict secret.

My father was born in the Winter Palace in 1897. He was the only one of Xenia and Sandro's children to have a 21-gun salute to mark his birth. It was unusual – a gun salute was an honour reserved exclusively for the son and heir of the Tsar – but it was done to please Xenia's mother the Dowager Empress. She wanted her eldest grandson to be treated like a Grand Duke.

The birth was late and Nicholas teased Xenia, telling her that only *lady elephants* are pregnant for 22 months! Father was born on January 25th – *our* January 25th – it's something different in the old Julian calendar, in part of the private apartments of the palace because Xenia was caught short. The room had an octagonal ceiling and it used to be Nicholas II's music room. It's sometimes open to the public now when special art exhibitions are housed there.

The windows in the room had two layers of glass, like an early form of double glazing. So my grandfather Sandro wrote the date and time of the birth and the name of the child on the inside of the inner window.

Xenia had seven children between the age of twenty and thirty, which is pretty good. Then after the birth of their last child Sandro started playing around a bit and Xenia took a lover, so they agreed to have a kind of open marriage. Some aristocrats did that once they'd had their children. In fact before the revolution Sandro and Xenia both had long running affairs with a married couple. They used to drive around the south of France in an open car, Sandro and his mistress in the front and her husband and Xenia in the back.

Now the fact that Xenia had a lover was no problem at all. The problem was that the man had been in jail for fraud. He was dodgy. These days nobody would give a monkey; people go in and out of prison all the time. But it was different in those days. To have a jailbird for a lover wasn't done!

My father and his brothers wore dresses until they were about three years old. In photographs it's very difficult to tell them apart. Again, that's what aristocratic families did – boys and girls were dressed the same.

## PRINCESS OLGA

After their first cosseted years when they were looked after by an English nanny in the nursery, the boys were put into a sailor suit and the regime became a little harsher. Finally, they went through a little more hardship until in the end they were sleeping in a cold dormitory. So they went from one extreme to the other so that they would be tough enough to join their regiment, or the navy. That was how it was done. And Father didn't go to school either; he was educated in the palace by tutors.

He and his cousins were similar ages, so they all played together. A lot has been written about Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia and Alexei because they were murdered and have since become martyrs. But Pa said they were perfectly normal average kids who just happened to have a Tsar for a father.

They had races with my father and his brothers in the vast corridors of the Winter Palace, and they had bicycle and pony races, roller-skated, climbed trees and played games just like any other cousins. I bet the girls would have practised kissing with their male cousins, because that's what young people did in those days. They were happy, normal children except they were watched and guarded of course – just as Prince George and Princess Charlotte are guarded by royal protection officers now – but in Russia it was the Cossacks who were responsible for the Imperial protection. One of their many problems was that they had a frail mother who used her illness as a power over her children. They were perfectly normal behind their mother's back but the Tsarina became withdrawn from society and frequently used her illness to stop her children doing things that they wanted to do.

Many, many years later I was brought up in a similar way by my mother, who in private always used to make the excuse that her heart was bad. Then she would take to her bed. In this way she'd be completely controlling, but she was a wonderful woman who my friends adored. They would always want to come and talk to 'Auntie Nadine', but she could be very difficult.

So the Tsarina was definitely a control freak. She also controlled Nicholas. For some reason the Romanov men mainly married women with very strong characters who liked to be in control – and the men liked to be dominated. God knows why! It's just one of those things. Nicholas was a darling man whom Pa adored. As he was the eldest

nephew, the Tsar used to take him on manoeuvres and Pa would carry the ensign of the regiment.

When the First World War broke out my father was in the Chevalier Guards. Now it was traditional for the Romanov boys, when they reached a certain age, to be sent to a courtesan, not a common whore, to learn how to make love. Making love was a talent, an *art*. It was like painting or music, it wasn't something to be botched. So when the time came they were sent off to the local courtesan – but Father refused to go because he was in love with Elsa, who was to become his first wife, and he was the *faithful* kind of man.

Pa met Elsa when he was about eighteen, or maybe even younger. Her father was Italian, from the Sasso-Ruffo family; her mother was Russian, from the Meshchersky family. Elsa was ten years older than my father. The problem was that she was married to my father's commanding officer and she already had two children by him. But it was all before the days of mobiles, so they would meet when Pa went off on manoeuvres. Pa had been having an affair with her for some time but it was all hushed up. By then he was a lieutenant in the Chevalier Guards but he didn't get his white mess dress because they felt something was afoot. Six months later the revolution broke out.



At the end of 1916, a few months before the revolution, Aunt Titti's husband Felix Yusupov was involved in the murder of Grigori Rasputin. This so-called 'mad Monk' from Siberia had become close to the Tsar and Tsarina as he was the only one who could help Alexei's haemophilia, but a lot of people disliked him and distrusted his influence.

Father liked Rasputin enormously. He said Rasputin wasn't a monk. He didn't bath, he liked to drink, he liked women, he had long hair – but I knew lots of people like that in the sixties. Pa always said Rasputin was a good man and that one day the truth would all come out. He *did* have the power of laying on of hands, which now they call hot hands. His father was also a sort of mystic, a horse whisperer in fact. When a horse was injured, he could lay his hands on the animal and it would recover. That's how the Tsar and Tsarina heard about Rasputin.

Felix, who was bisexual, and his lover Grand Duke Dmitri thought that *they* had murdered Rasputin. Felix invited Rasputin to his private

## PRINCESS OLGA

apartment in the basement of the Yusupov Palace with the promise of young girls joining the party – his fondness for female company was well known. They charged the doctor with putting poison in the cakes and wine but Rasputin ate the cakes and drank the wine without anything happening. So, when he got up and started to walk around, Felix shot him, but he still wasn't dead. Then he tried to get out of the palace and was shot again.

I suppose Felix and Dmitri thought he was badly injured and decided to finish him off by drowning him in the River Neva. Having thrown him into the river, they thought they'd done their bit and succeeded in killing him.

But now that the archives are open, it appears that the doctor refused to put the poison in the cakes, which is why they couldn't understand how Rasputin was still walking around the apartment after he'd eaten them. There is also evidence to suggest it was Oswald Rayner from MI6 who shot him and that he was dead by the time he was thrown into the river. Rayner was an old friend of Felix from their time at Oxford University. The British had been tailing Rasputin for a long time because he was allegedly brokering a peace deal between the Germans and the Tsar which would have adversely affected the British.

Felix, however, always maintained *he* had killed Rasputin. He even wrote a book about it. Father was livid and never forgave him for his part in the murder. Incidentally, the room is still furnished as an apartment, with a rather goulish waxwork display of Felix and Rasputin!

A few days before his death, Rasputin was said to have left a letter addressed to the Tsar. He wrote: "if it was your relations who wrought my death then not one of your family, that is to say, none of your children or relations, will remain alive for more than two years. They will be killed by the Russian people..."

Although it's now come out that this story was concocted by Rasputin's secretary, the ominous prediction tragically *did* come true.



In February 1917 the revolution broke out. It started with riots over bread shortages in the capital but soon thousands of workers were marching through the streets holding red banners, chanting, "Down with the government," "Down with the war." Nicholas had gone back

## THE ROMANOV LEGACY

to army headquarters, hundreds of miles away. The chief Ministers were mainly the appointees of the Empress (who had been guided by Rasputin) and this was unpopular with the people. The Tsar was urged to return and appoint a Ministry acceptable to the Duma (the Russian parliament) but he didn't realise how serious the situation was and he ignored the pleas for concessions.

When the troops fraternised with the mob, the situation spiralled out of control and, by the time Nicholas decided to return, it was too late. The Imperial Government had collapsed and the railway line to the capital was blocked by revolutionaries. When Nicholas couldn't get back to the capital his train doubled back to Pskov.

Meanwhile Grand Duke Kyrill, who was the tsar's first cousin, had pledged allegiance to the Duma. Father said the Grand Duke had actually marched to the Duma at the head of his regiment of naval guards with a red band on his uniform! Then he returned to his palace and hoisted a red flag on the roof. Pa said Kyrill 'turned turtle' and went from being a White to a Red. He was the first Romanov to break his oath of allegiance to the Tsar. And this was the Tsar's cousin!

Then Nicholas at last agreed to appoint an acceptable ministry but the newly-formed Provisional Government had already decided that he *must* abdicate in favour of Alexei. So on 2 March 1917 Nicholas signed the abdication document in his railway carriage.

It was originally intended that his brother Michael would be regent until 12-year-old Alexei came of age, but Nicholas realised that meant he and Alexandra would be separated from their son. He didn't want that, so he changed his mind and abdicated in favour of Michael.

The next day Michael was told by the Provisional Government that anti-monarchist feeling was high. They couldn't guarantee his safety, so he refused the throne, saying that he would not accept it until asked to by an *elected* Assembly. That was the end of the Romanov dynasty, and Nicholas was brought back to the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo under arrest.



The British King, George V, was a first cousin of Nicholas II and also, of course, of his sister my grandmother Xenia. They had all been very close ever since they were children, but when the Tsar abdicated

## PRINCESS OLGA

the British refused to give him asylum. My father always said it was the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, who wouldn't let them come to Britain and he blamed him. It turns out that this probably was right after all and that King George *did* want them to come.

Recently I made a complete idiot of myself crying on national television during a documentary about the Royal House of Windsor. About four days later a man telephoned me and said, "I was so touched by you crying on television and I don't want you to feel that George V didn't try to get your grandmother out of Russia, because he did." This was just after the revolution, when Xenia was stranded in Petrograd because all her cars had been requisitioned by the Provisional Government.

And he added: "The reason I know this to be true is because my grandfather was the officer who was sent from England to rescue your grandmother from her freezing palace by sledge, along with some of her children, and to put her on a train to take her to the Crimea, so that the family were together to be rescued."

The man's grandfather who went out to Russia was a young officer in the Highland Light Infantry. He could think on his feet without too much of a problem and he managed to get to Xenia and escort her down to the Crimea by train. She left the capital towards the end of March 1917.

He was unable to help poor Tsar Nicholas because he was under arrest at the Alexander Palace with his family but, thanks to King George, Xenia was able to join other members of her own family in the Crimea, which at that time was relatively safe.

It was a secret mission, so even the officer's wife didn't know about it, but when the officer eventually came back to Britain and told his wife whom he'd been to rescue, she was not pleased. Xenia was known to be so beautiful that men fell flat at her feet.

When he came back to London, Lloyd George apparently was livid. It seems that he didn't really believe in royalty or imperialism and he definitely didn't want the Romanovs to come to Britain. Later, however, as the officer's uniform included the wearing of a kilt, King George presented him with a dirk – a ceremonial dagger – in recognition of his service.

According to this man's grandfather, there was also a suspicion at the time that M15 had been penetrated by a mole sympathetic to the

## THE ROMANOV LEGACY

Bolshevik cause. Anything written had to be in code to preserve total secrecy.

In the Royal Archives there is indeed a letter from George V to Lloyd George that says the Romanovs must not be allowed to come to England. It was shown in the television programme. The man on the telephone explained that King George was persuaded to write that letter to Lloyd George rescinding permission because of the threat posed by the mole. It put King George and his family in a very difficult position.

All this happened at the time the King was trying to make the royal family 'user-friendly' to the British people by replacing the Royal Family's German name of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha with the more English-sounding 'House of Windsor'. There was a lot of anti-German feeling in Britain at the time, with shop windows being broken and dachshunds stoned in the streets, and the problem was that, although Nicholas's wife Alexandra was Queen Victoria's granddaughter, she *was* German and the British didn't want *her* to come to this country. That's what I was always told, anyway. Also, the British didn't want an influx of the Romanovs because they were a *huge* family.

With no rescue in sight, the Tsar and his family were sent to Tobolsk in Siberia in the summer of 1917. Of course everyone hoped they would escape. So when later that year a telegram from Edinburgh was delivered to the Tsarina's sister Victoria, Marchioness of Milford Haven, saying "Tatiana has arrived!" it caused great excitement. The family initially took it to mean that the Tsar's daughter had escaped from captivity, but in fact the telegram was from Victoria's son George and his wife, announcing the birth of their daughter.



Lenin's seizure of power in October 1917 was the death-knell for the Romanovs. The Tsar and his family were murdered by the Bolsheviks the following year. I don't know any more about what happened in July 1918 than is generally known. My father was none the wiser either. No one knows exactly what happened, apart from the people who carried out the murders.

At the time when the Tsar and his family were killed, my father, my grandmother and my *great*-grandmother Dagmar were all in Yalta,

## PRINCESS OLGA

hundreds of miles away from Ekaterinburg, which is in the foothills of the Urals as you're going to Siberia. It took a few weeks for the news that they had been murdered to filter through to them. What *actually* happened I don't think anyone will really know, but we *do* know that they were murdered. My great-grandmother would never admit that this atrocity had happened. She would never ever talk about it, and if ever it was mentioned she said that the Russians would never murder her son, the Tsar. Many other Grand Dukes were also murdered, but their fate is not talked about so much and modern Russians didn't hear anything about it until quite recently. My father's uncle Michael, the Tsar's brother, was shot in Perm in 1918. Then, on my grandfather's side, my father's uncle Grand Duke Sergei Michaelovich was murdered at around the same time at Alapayevsk, also in the Urals. He was thrown down a mineshaft with other members of his family. My father lost two more uncles, shot by a firing squad in early 1919.



Meanwhile, my father's family and some of their cousins were under house arrest in the Crimea for eight months. For part of the time they were in my grandfather Sandro's own home, Ai-Todor.

What I didn't realise was that, before they were arrested, Papa used to go up to the capital (which had been renamed Petrograd) incognito from the Crimea to see what was going on in the palaces. He went several times. Prince Felix Yusupov also travelled there to hide jewels and artworks in his own palaces in the hope of getting it all back later. He and Pa didn't travel together though, as Felix was too well-known. Pa could just go under the radar.

While they were under arrest my great-grandmother Dagmar, Empress Maria Feodorovna, kept a diary. It was something she had done for years. Amongst the incidents recorded – she told how suddenly one night sailors poured into her bedroom at Ai-Todor showing no respect. She heard a voice telling her to get out of bed. It was an officer of the new Provisional Government who wanted to search her room to find compromising documents that they were convinced she had hidden there.

Dagmar wrote in detail about the disrespectful attitude of these people, especially one of the women. She called this woman the worst

## THE ROMANOV LEGACY

possible things – she even tore away the mattress to search for papers hidden inside. Then the officer looked in the drawers of her writing table. They took documents from her on that occasion and also her old diaries, but not her jewellery box. Sitting in her chair she would hide it under her skirts when the Bolsheviks came. They never found it.

Early in 1918 they were moved to the nearby palace of Djulber under guard, about to be shot by the Bolsheviks at any second. They only escaped the firing squad because that part of the Crimea was overrun by the Germans. Otherwise they would definitely have all perished.

In April 1919 George V sent *HMS Marlborough* to the Crimea to rescue my grandmother Xenia, great grandmother Dagmar, my uncles and Aunt Titti. They managed to get out just before the Bolsheviks retook the area.

There was a man called Zadorojny who was in charge while they were under house arrest. When the Bolsheviks came to shoot the Romanovs he always made up excuses as to why that day wasn't right for the executions and sent them away again. But years later, Papa was made President of the *Chaine des Rotisseurs*, an International Association of Gastronomy, and one of the people there was Jewish. He told Papa that Zadorojny was well-known to them as a hero for saving the lives of that branch of the Imperial family.

My grandfather Sandro, my father and Elsa left Russia on *HMS Forsythe* four months before the rest of the family. At some point Elsa's husband had either died or they had divorced, sources differ on this point, but by November 1918 she was around five months pregnant by Pa. They married in November in the chapel at Ai-Todor, which was all quite romantic, but my great-grandmother refused to go to the wedding. The following month Pa and Elsa sailed to France with Sandro to try and drum up support for the White Russian army, which of course as we all know now failed.

They never realised that was the end. Papa really believed that this was going to be a temporary glitch and they would be back in Russia. As time rolled on, my great-grandmother, grandmother and all the others also realised things were rather dire. My grandmother's sister Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna got out of Russia a different way because she had married a commoner just before the revolution.

## PRINCESS OLGA

Her married name was Kulikovsky and the Bolsheviks no longer recognised that she was a Romanov, so she was off the Soviet hit list, unlike the others. The same goes for Aunt Titti, whose married name was Yusupov. But any Grand Duke or Duchess was about to be shot. Olga was an artist. She had two boys with Colonel Kulikovsky and died in Canada in 1960. Their great-grandson and I sometimes see each other in Russia, and Fran, one of my sons, is in touch with him quite a lot.



My grandfather Sandro *never* came to England after the revolution. As I said, the government here wasn't keen on being overrun by Romanov Grand Dukes and by that time my grandparents were amicably separated. Not by law, but they'd had their lovers and just came to an agreement. Sandro was extremely angry at the way the British treated Nicholas and everybody else. He was a very close advisor of the Tsar and wrote him a letter just before the revolution saying, "You're making a terrible mistake..." but Nicholas wouldn't listen.

Sandro, who spoke many languages, was very happy to remain in France, which was perfect. But Xenia did go and see him when he was ill. He died of spinal cancer, but she went to the South of France so that she could be with him during that period. They remained close. He and Xenia are buried in Roquebrune Cemetery, which apparently overlooks a bay in the south of France. I've never been there but it's a special cemetery where many Russians are buried and their graves are together. It's rather a pretty place, because it's got mimosa bushes and plants around the cemetery.



Pa was twenty-one when he arrived in France. Shortly afterwards he became a father when my half-sister Xenia was born in Paris. So Pa had three children before he was twenty-five – Xenia, Michael and Andrew, all very close together in age – and then he had me with his second wife when he was fifty-four.

Quite a lot of the entourage who worked for them had left Russia on the *Marlborough* or the *Forsythe*, so they had the nannies. They looked after the children, so my father and Elsa went out to parties or functions

at the embassies. They socialised a lot, so didn't spend much time with the children, as was the custom for upper class families then. He and Elsa were very happy though.

They remained in Paris for a while. But although Pa was a Russian prince he had to earn a living. Luckily he was *very* creative, so they opened a shop designing handbags, scarves and costume jewellery. In fact it was a little more elaborate than ordinary costume jewellery as he would use lapis lazuli and other semi precious stones, but it certainly wasn't Fabergé. I still have the book of his designs.

At first the shop was very successful, they were making quite a lot of money and it was all going swimmingly. Then Papa's silent partner ran away with the takings, so they came to England when their eldest son Michael was born.

I *think* Pa started the business all over again somewhere in London, but I don't think it lasted very long. I believe the same thing happened, and allegedly the partner ran off with the takings. Of course Pa knew nothing about money because he had never had to carry any. In Russia such matters were taken care of by staff.



King George V was *wonderful* to my grandmother Xenia. Queen Mary wasn't keen on George and Xenia being so close. She might have been a little jealous, but the cousins had known each other since nursery days. My grandmother was George's favourite cousin.

I know my father was in awe of Queen Mary. And I think he *liked* her. She did quite a lot of good things during the war, like turning up on bomb sites and visiting factories. George and Mary were brave – they didn't get up and leave Buckingham Palace.

Queen Mary had a rather annoying habit though. She would go to a dinner party and the hosts would seat her on the best Sheraton chair. There were maybe eleven more chairs around the table. During dinner she'd say: "*Oh, I do* like this chair." And the hosts felt obliged to give her the whole set of twelve. When she'd come to tea she would say, "Oh, gosh that jug's beautiful! I've got one like that and it would be so nice to have a pair..." and the people would resist. But she'd sit there till seven o'clock, and in the end they had to give it to her to get rid of her.

## PRINCESS OLGA

People got wise to this and when she was visiting they would put their *best* things into the attic and bring out their *second* best. She was well known for it. One day Queen Mary showed Xenia a beautiful Fabergé rose jade box with a diamond and emerald monogram above the Imperial crown, which she had just acquired. "I would be interested to know whose initials those are," she said. Xenia looked at the entwined 'K.A.' and said, "They are mine."

Allegedly there's a room at Buckingham Palace, which isn't on view, which was once Queen Mary's room. It is crammed full of stuff she 'collected' from the houses she stayed in or visited, but nobody knows who it all belongs to because they're all dead now.

During the Second World War Queen Mary went to stay with her niece the Duchess of Beaufort at Badminton with an entourage of *sixty* people. Admittedly the house *was* an estate, so it was self-sufficient and had its own herd of cows and other animals. Still, she didn't put her hand in her pocket once.

Once Pa and Elsa came to England, they never left. They lived with my grandmother, because George V had granted Xenia a grace and favour home, Frogmore Cottage, which is actually a rather large house near Windsor Castle.

My youngest half brother Andrew wrote a book called *The Boy Who Would be Tsar*. In it he tells how one Easter an enormous chocolate egg was delivered to Frogmore Cottage from Fortnum's or Harrods. It was an absolutely beautiful Easter Egg and he and his siblings soon devoured it. Shortly afterwards a flunky knocked on the door. "I think an Easter Egg might have been delivered here in error. It should have gone to the castle. It was meant for Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret." Whereupon the person who opened the door had to admit, "I'm so sorry, but the children ate it all."

Just before the Second World War my grandmother was granted another grace and favour home, Wilderness House at Hampton Court Palace. Father and Elsa moved in there with her.

On 29 October 1940 the house was bombed during the blitz and the windows were shattered. Elsa, who had been suffering from cancer of the rectum for some time, died that day. She was only fifty-one. The funeral service was held in the chapel at Wilderness House and she was buried in Old Windsor cemetery.

## THE ROMANOV LEGACY

My half-brothers joined the navy in the Second World War and they both saw lots of action. The eldest one Michael was an officer, and was an aeronautical tool engineer on one of the famous aircraft carriers. Andrew joined as a rating and for some reason never became an officer. I don't think he wanted to. I know he went to officer school because I've found his letters, but he quite enjoyed his life as a rating. He spent a very active war up in Scapa Flow in Scotland, amongst other places, and then at some point joined the action.

The two different ships the brothers were on happened to be in Hong Kong at the same time and they met. So one day Michael, the officer, took his brother, whom he hadn't seen for three years or so, to the Officers' club. That caused a *huge* hoo-ha. He was rapped over the knuckles and evicted because he'd brought a mere *rating* – even though it was his brother – into the Officers' club!

When the war ended, Michael was de-mobbed in Australia. He had three wives – two were Australian and one an Australian-Italian – and spent the rest of his life in Australia. Occasionally he travelled abroad. Sadly he died in Sydney in 2008. Andrew emigrated to the States when he was quite young. On the back of his book *The Boy Who Would Be Tsar* is a photograph of a telegram from my parents dated 4 February 1949, wishing him luck. He visited England a few times but never came back permanently. Andrew also married three times and was the only one of my siblings who had children. He married a Russian woman and divorced. Then he married an American woman and was widowed. Then he married for a third time. He is ninety-five now and lives in California.

My half-sister Xenia was known as Mysh, because she looked like a mouse when she was born. *Mysb* is mouse in Russian. People used to mistake her for my father's sister because Papa was only just twenty-two when she was born. She had very dark hair, chain smoked *Gauloise* and *Disque Bleu* and sounded foreign too.

My poor sister used to get tortured by the old *Babushkas*, the servants who came out on the *Marlborough* with them and looked after my grandmother, because they said it was *her* fault that Papa *had* to marry Elsa. I remember Mysh saying they were quite cruel to her, really mean and nasty.

Another person who was sometimes unkind to my sister when they

## PRINCESS OLGA

were at the same parties, although she was a lot younger than Mysh, was Princess Margaret.

Mysh trained as a nurse at Great Ormond Street Hospital and to supplement her income she modelled for Elizabeth Arden. In those days Elizabeth Arden made clothes as well as make up and they approached Mysh and asked her to model for them. She was photographed in *Tatler* and other glossy magazines – she was a good model.

Mysh was married by the time I came along. Most of the time she was really nice but she and my mother didn't get on. The first man she married was an American from the US Army – Calhoun Ancrum from South Carolina – and they divorced quite soon afterwards.

Then she married a lovely man called Dr Geoffrey Tooth, who at some point was the head of the mental side of the Ministry of Health under Enoch Powell. He was the same age as my mother. They lived in England until he retired, then they bought a barn in France. While they renovated the place they lived on their boat in a creek in Britain and then they moved permanently to France. They both loved France, and stayed there until they died.

After Wilderness House was bombed in 1940 my father and grandmother went up to Scotland to get away from the blitz. King George VI lent them Craigowan, a house on the Balmoral estate where Prince Charles and his first wife Diana spent a lot of time. It was while he was living in Scotland that Father met my mother again.